



# Agent Orange Review

Vol. 10, NO. 1

*Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam*

February 1993

## **NAS Committee Continues Active Pace**

As called for in Public Law 102-4, the "Agent Orange Act of 1991," the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has undertaken a review and evaluation of available scientific evidence regarding associations between diseases and exposure to dioxin and other chemical compounds in herbicides used in Vietnam.

Diseases and adverse health effects being considered in the review include ( 1 ) cancers of the stomach, colon, hepatobiliary tract, testis, prostate, kidney, and brain, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, and soft tissue sarcoma, and other cancers; (2) metabolic disorders including diabetes, altered lipid metabolism, and porphyria cutanea tarda; (3) autoimmune and other immunological disorders; (4) neurologic and psychosocial disorders; (5) disorders of the digestive system including gastrointestinal ulcers and hepatotoxic effects; (6) reproductive disorders including birth defects, miscarriages, and abnormal sperm morphology; (7) chloracne and other skin disorders; (8) circulatory disorders; and (9) respiratory disorders.

### **Committee Membership**

To conduct the review, the NAS Institute of Medicine (IOM) established the Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans of Exposure to Herbicides. Committee members represent a wide range of expertise in environmental and occupational medicine, toxicology, pathology, genetics, clinical oncology, psychology, neurology, epidemiology, and biostatistics. The IOM chose members who are trained and knowledgeable in relevant scientific disciplines, but who have not taken strong public positions on the health effects of Agent Orange or other herbicides, or on dioxin.

The Committee is chaired by Harold Fallon, M.D., Chair of the Department of Medicine of the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia. David Tollerud, M.D., M.P.H., from the Department of Environmental and Occupational Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, is vice-chair. Norman Breslow, Ph.D., Professor and Chairman of the University of Washington's Department of Biostatistics is the liaison between the Committee and the Institute of Medicine's Board on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

### **Meetings**

The Committee held its first meeting on June 26, 1992. The morning session, which was opened to invited guests and

speakers, was devoted to providing Committee members with expectations, interpretations of the congressional charge, and essential background information. Invited speakers included officials from the following government entities: VA, the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, the Office of Technology Assessment, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Comments were also received from individuals not affiliated with the government. Much of the initial meeting was spent planning the Committee's efforts for the remaining period of the project.

A second meeting took place on September 9-10, 1992. The Committee held a public meeting on September 9 to solicit from the general public scientific information on the health effects of exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam. To reach a broad range of interested individuals to attend the public meeting and present testimony, the IOM sent announcements to about 940 individuals and organizations. The Committee received oral testimony from 22 individuals and written statements from 22 individuals. All who requested to speak before the Committee were given 5-7 minutes to present their information. Following the scheduled presentations, time was made available for others at the open meeting to address the Committee.

The Committee held its third meeting on December 8-9, 1992. An open scientific workshop was conducted on December 8, 1992, to discuss and compare methods for estimating exposure to Agent Orange, other herbicides, and dioxin in epidemiological studies. There were four sessions or panels at the workshop to address (1) the military use of herbicides in Vietnam, (2) records-based measures of exposures to herbicides in Vietnam veterans, (3) validation of records-based measures of exposure to herbicides in Vietnam veterans, and (4) biomarkers for exposure assessment.

The workshop was followed by a Committee meeting on December 9, 1992. The Committee has established four working groups, based on possible health outcomes. These groups are ( 1 ) cancer, (2) reproductive effects, (3) neurobehavioral effects, and (4) other health effects. During this meeting, members met with their respective working groups, planned Committee activities for the balance of the review, approved an outline for the final report, and discussed assignments for reviewing literature and drafting the required report.

To obtain a copy of the transcript of either the September 9, 1992 public meeting or the December 8, 1992 scientific workshop, send your name, address, and telephone number, along with a check for \$20.00 payable to the National Academy of Sciences, to Catherine Wesner, (FO-312C),



Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20418. Please specify which transcript you would like to receive.

Additional meetings are planned for February 1993, April 1993, and, if necessary, May 1993.

### **Legal Requirements**

Section 3 of Public Law 1024 required VA to seek to enter into a contract with the NAS (or should NAS decline, another non-government not-for-profit scientific entity) to review scientific and medical information regarding the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam. The contract with the NAS was signed on January 31, 1992.

For each disease suspected of being associated with exposure to an herbicide, the NAS will review and summarize the relevant scientific evidence and determine (1) whether there is a statistical association with exposure to the herbicide; (2) the increased risk of disease among those exposed to the herbicides during service in Vietnam; and (3) whether there is a plausible biological mechanism or other evidence of a causal relationship between herbicide exposure and the disease.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs will establish in regulations a presumption of service connection for diseases that the Secretary determines to have a positive association with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides used in Vietnam. These determinations will be based on sound medical and scientific evidence, taking into account reports from the NAS under Section 3 and all other scientific information available.

The NAS also may make recommendations for further studies to resolve areas of continuing scientific uncertainty about the health effects of exposure to herbicide agents.

Under the term of the contract with VA, the first report by the NAS is due not later than July 31, 1993.

The law also authorizes follow-up reviews by the NAS, to the extent that appropriations are available, at least once every two years for ten years after the initial report.

(For additional information regarding the contract between VA and the NAS, see the April 1992 and September 1992 issues of the "Agent Orange Review").

### **Ranch Hand Reproductive Study Results Released**

On August 31, 1992, the Air Force released its fifth report on the health of former Air Force men exposed to Agent Orange and its dioxin contaminant during Operation Ranch Hand in Vietnam. The study compared blood dioxin levels with reproductive outcomes.

The study included all of the 791 Ranch Hands and 942 comparison subjects who have measured levels of dioxin in their blood. It analyzed miscarriages, total adverse outcomes, total conceptions, birth weights, birth defects, birth defect severity, specific and multiple birth defects, and infant and neonatal deaths. In addition, the study looked at sperm counts and the percentage of abnormal sperm of study participants. Investigators found no adverse relationship between dioxin and

### **About the Review...**

The "Agent Orange Review" is prepared by VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS). The "Review" is published periodically to provide information on Agent Orange and related matters to Vietnam veterans, their families, and others with concerns about herbicides used in Vietnam. The initial newsletter was released in November 1982. This is the twenty-second issue.

The "Review" is prepared approximately one to two months prior to the publication date. This issue was written in late December 1992 and early January 1993 and does not include developments that occurred during much of January 1993.

Comments or questions about the content of the "Review" are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Writer/Editor, Agent Orange Review, Environmental Agents Service (116A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this issue, should also be directed to Mr. Rosenblum. Please specify the number of copies requested. A limited supply of the last ten issues (October 1989, May 1990, August 1990, February 1991, April 1991, August 1991, December 1991, April 1992, September 1992, and February 1993) is also available. VA facilities should order additional copies from the VA Supply Depot.

VA updates the "Review" mailing address listing annually based on IRS records. "Review" recipients who have not been filing Federal income tax returns annually and have moved to another residence are encouraged to send their old and new addresses and Social Security number to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Automation Center (200/397), 1615 Woodward Street, Austin, Texas 78772-0001.

Questions about the Agent Orange Registry examination program should be directed to the Environmental Physician or Agent Orange Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center. Questions regarding VA benefit programs, including disability compensation, should be referred to a veterans benefits counselor at the nearest VA facility. The telephone numbers can be found in the telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings.

any of these reproductive outcomes, nor between dioxin and sperm count or percentage of abnormal sperm.

This portion of the Air Force Health Study on Agent Orange is part of a 20-year effort to evaluate the health of those who participated in Operation Ranch Hand, the aerial Spraying of herbicides in Vietnam from 1962 to 1971. The comparison group is Comprised of Air Force veterans who flew or serviced C-130 cargo aircraft in Southeast Asia during this time period.

The Air Force Health Study, now in its tenth year, will continue follow-up questionnaires, medical record reviews and physical examinations in 1997 and 2002 to further assess health

effects. Results from examinations conducted in 1992 are expected in early 1993.

The study is being conducted by the U.S. Air Force Armstrong Laboratory Epidemiologic Research Division under contract with Sciences Applications International Corporation, Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation, and the National Opinion Research Center. Col. William H. Wolfe at Armstrong Laboratory is the principal investigator.

Articles regarding previous Air Force Health Study results have appeared in numerous issues of the "Agent Orange Review," including the following recent issues: May 1990, February 1991, August 1991, and April 1992.

Inquiries concerning the recent report or ongoing research effort should be directed to the Office of the Air Force Surgeon General, Bolling AFB, Washington, DC 20332-6188.



*Acting Secretary, Other Key VA Officials with Korean Delegation.*

## **Korean Delegation Meets VA Officials in Washington**

In December, a delegation from the Republic of Korea visited VA officials at VA headquarters in Washington to discuss Agent Orange-related issues.

Korean Vietnam era veterans who may have been adversely affected by exposure to Agent Orange are seeking disability compensation and medical treatment from the Korean government. Thousands of Korean troops served in Vietnam, and some of these individuals have subsequently experienced health problems that may be related to Agent Orange or some other aspect of their military service in Vietnam.

The Korean delegation was comprised of four officials from the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs and two medical specialists from the Korean Veterans Hospital. The chief of this team was Mr. Chang, kwy-Ho, Director General of the Administration Bureau of the Ministry.

In addition to several days of meetings in Washington where they were provided a large volume of Agent Orange-related documents, the delegation was given a comprehensive tour of the Agent Orange program at the VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia.

## **VA Publishes Literature Review Update and Synopsis**

VA recently published Volumes XIX and XX of the *Review of Literature on Herbicides, Including Phenoxv Herbicides and Associated Dioxins*. The report consists of an analysis and annotated bibliography of literature produced worldwide regarding Agent Orange and other herbicides. The comprehensive technical document is prepared primarily for researchers, physicians, scientists, and others with similar backgrounds.

The initial two volumes of the literature review, mandated by Public Law 96-151, were released in 1981. The latest issues describe herbicide literature that became available in 1991. Additional volumes covering more recent publications are planned.

Copies of all volumes are maintained at VA medical center libraries. The report has also been distributed to researchers throughout the world. The reviews are prepared by independent contractors.

To assist non-technical readers in understanding the complex scientific issues involving Agent Orange and other herbicides, VA also publishes a series of "lay language" summaries, entitled *Synopsis of Scientific Literature on Phenoxv Herbicides and Associated Dioxins*.

Number 9 in the synopsis series corresponds with Volume XIX and XX of the literature review. The summaries, published as booklets, were prepared by the same contractors who produced the literature review. Copies of the synopses have been sent to all VA medical center libraries. A limited supply of the latest issues of the literature review and synopsis is available from the Environmental Agent Service.

## **Q's and A's**

The Q's and A's (Questions and Answers) feature of the "Review" responds to questions that have been received from various sources. Questions for future issues should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Writer/Editor, Environmental Agents Service (116A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. We cannot guarantee that all questions received will be used in this column.

Several veterans in correctional institutions have asked about the availability of Agent Orange Registry examinations. VA continues to receive a substantial number of inquiries about payments from the "settlement fund."

### **How can an incarcerated veteran obtain an Agent Orange Registry examination?**

A veteran in the custody of penal authorities, or under criminal charges, does not forfeit any right to medical care by VA. However, due to the need to maintain the proper medical environment, including consideration of safety and liability factors, incarcerated veterans may be accepted, if otherwise eligible, for medical care only when released by an authorized official under circumstances where there is no obligation placed on VA to exercise custodial restraint or to assure the return of the veteran to custody upon completion of treatment.

Outpatient treatment will not be provided by VA at the penal institution for an applicant serving a sentence. If a veteran is paroled from a penal institution for the purposes of receiving VA staff care, the penal institution will be informed that VA is under no obligation ( 1 ) for the custody of or administration of punishment to the veteran, and (2) for the return of the veteran to civil authorities either during or upon completion of treatment. The clinic director or designee will notify the civil authorities when treatment will be completed. Circumstances under which incarcerated veterans may be accepted for treatment in VA facilities are limited.

Assistance by VA medical facilities can be provided to penal authorities or institution agreeable to providing examinations, without reimbursement from VA, to veterans for purposes of entry into the Agent Orange Registry. Copies of directives, code sheets, etc., will be provided to penal institutions upon request. Penal authorities are advised at the time of such requests that the examination results should be returned to the VA medical facility of jurisdiction for inclusion, on the veteran's behalf, in the VA Agent Orange Registry.

### **How can a veteran get his (or her) fair share from the settlement of the Agent Orange lawsuit?**

Contact the Agent Orange Veteran Payment Program, P.O. Box 110, Hartford, Connecticut 06104; telephone: 1-800-225-4712. This program is not affiliated with VA.

## **Agent Orange Fact Sheet Series Updated**

The Environmental Agents Service in VA headquarters in Washington, DC, recently updated and released a series of Agent Orange fact sheets, known as "Agent Orange Briefs."

The revised "Briefs," dated January 1993, describe a wide range of Agent Orange-related matters. The following "Briefs" are currently available: (A1) **Agent Orange - General Information**, (A2) **Agent Orange Class Action Lawsuit**, (B1) **Agent Orange Registry**, (B2) **Agent Orange -**

**Priority Treatment Program**, (B3) **Agent Orange and VA Disability Compensation**, (B4) **VA Information Resources on Agent Orange and Related Matters**, (C 1) **Agent Orange - The Problem Encountered in Research**, (C2) **Agent Orange and Vietnam Related Research - VA Efforts**, (C3) **Agent Orange and Vietnam Related Research - Non-VA Efforts**, (D1) **Agent Orange and Birth Defects**, (D2) **Agent Orange and Chloracne**, (D3) **Agent Orange and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphomas**, (D4) **Agent Orange and Soft Tissue Sarcomas**, and (D5) **Agent Orange and Peripheral Neuropathy**.

The "Briefs" were distributed throughout the VA system and to various State offices. Earlier versions of the "Briefs" were released in October 1988, October 1989, September 1990, July 1991, and February 1992. Copies of the outdated issues are no longer available.

For additional information or a copy of the new fact sheets, contact the Agent Orange Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center or write to the Environmental Agents Service (116A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

### **Class Action Lawsuit Referral Information**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has received many inquiries regarding the status of claims for compensation from the Agent Orange Settlement Fund. This fund was established by a Federal court as a result of the settlement of a class action lawsuit ("Agent Orange" Product Liability Litigation) brought by Vietnam veterans and their families against the manufacturers of Agent Orange.

Neither VA nor any other Federal Executive Branch department or agency is directly involved in the distribution of the settlement funds. Information on this matter can be obtained by calling, toll-free 1-800-225-4712, or writing to the Agent Orange Veteran Payment Program, P.O. Box 110, Hartford, Connecticut 06104.

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**Department of Veterans Affairs**  
Environmental Agents Service (131)  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

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